DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 379 CS 006 332

AUTHOR Adams, Ruth R.
TITLE Identifying and Developing the Potential Talent of Teachers.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (26th, New Orleans, LA, April 27-May 1, 1981). For related documents, see CS 006 333-336.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Humanistic Education; Humanization; *Preservice Teacher Education; Reading Instruction; *Reading Teachers; Teacher Education Curriculum; *Teaching Methods; *Teaching Styles; Undergraduate Students; Urban Universities
IDENTIFIERS City University of New York City College

ABSTRACT

One of five papers discussing the humanistic model used in the training of reading teachers at City College of New York, this paper describes the high priority given by the program to individual students in order to help them identify and develop their unique teaching styles. The paper stresses that this individual attention is especially important in an urban setting where many college students feel that their educational backgrounds are inadequate. The program aspects discussed in the paper include (1) building on the student's general liberal arts/cultural background in each professional course; (2) promoting the student's self-confidence toward the teaching of reading by developing his or her proficiency in the basic components of the field; (3) helping students learn to criticize themselves and measure their own progress; (4) holding frequent conferences with students; (5) providing ample time in class for discussion, sharing of ideas, and questions so that students gain self-esteem as others adopt their ideas; and (6) helping students construct and reconstruct values through their experiences with inner city children and through their readings. (FL)

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"Identifying and Developing the Potential Talent of Teachers"

Speech to be delivered at the International Reading Association Conference

April 29, 1981 — New Orleans, La.

Prof. Ruth R. Adams — The City College of N. Y.

You have heard our working definition of the humanistic approach. It deals with human interests and values and a belief that the individual must be given the highest priority. Our program is "person-centered" whether that person is our undergraduate or graduate student or the child with whom we work in the Reading Center or classroom.

The aspect that I would like to discuss deals with the potential of our students - graduate and undergraduate - who are taking their training with us. I should like to describe our goals and procedures, our efforts to assist these students in identifying their own strengths and their general potential, as well as, in helping them to develop that potential including both cognitive and affective strengths.

Who are our students?

Our students already teach or plan to teach in urban areas. Many of them have attended schools in such areas. It is not unusual for us to hear from our students the following reason for their going into teaching: "I don't want

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to see the schools fail other children as they failed me in certain ways." One of the ways, they feel, they were failed, is the lack of encouragement they received; the lack of anyone to recognize or try to develop their abilities. Many children go to the school with self confidence instilled by the home. That self-confidence is reinforced as they succeed in school. Other children lack this basic foundation and if they do not reveal academic strengths immediately, the sense of self-confidence never appears.

Many of our students lack self-confidence. They feel hesitant about their possible contributions to the education of the children they will teach. A second group of our students come from areas where English was not the first language spoken. City College students come from every corner of the globe -- we have students speaking over 30 different languages here. They know how strange one can feel when one enters a new situation. We would like them to empathize, then, with children who are in a similar plight. One child who arrived from Ecuador said to me in Spanish, "Soy inteligente. Se la contestacion, pero no en ingles." "I am smart. I know the answer but not in English." Her teacher let her answer in Spanish and she told her, "I know how you feel. My English is still a translation."

Another group of students are our "older" students who have returned to education after a number of years of raising families. These students bring special types of experience to teaching but many lack the confidence to begin or lack the

the feeling that they will succeed. Among this group are educational assistants who have climbed the "career ladder" and now have a college degree or are working towards it. They juggle home and job; teaching and learning.

Cognitive aspects

James Conant, in his book The Education of American Teachers, deals entirely with the cognitive aspects of teaching. We agree that this is of prime importance. At the City College our undergraduate program follows Conant's "All University approach." We seek for our undergraduate students a strong, liberal arts base. On the graduate level, however, because of State Certification requirements and a growing number of professional requirements, we have moved away somewhat from the liberal arts. Also, we often assume wrongly that such a basis was established on the undergraduate level or at a community college.

One of the goals of our program, therefore, for our students, is to broaden or build on this cultural base in every course offered. Whether the aim be improved communications skills or aspects of art history we feel that such material must be included in our professional coursework. We also work closely (again on Conant's advice) with our College of Liberal Arts, drawing on their resources in such areas as Speech, Puerto Rican Studies, Black Studies or History.

We are seeking to develop teachers using the model set up for us by John Dewey. He was concerned with an emphasis on thinking. He taught us that we learn

what we live. When the quality of life and living is low and debased, this is what we learn. Dewey showed us that a teacher must not only inform, explain and show how but, must provide opportunities to students for thinking and doubt. Our cognitive goals are involved with helping develop a basis for thought -- a well-prepared mind. Bruner tells us that discovery favors that well-prepared mind. Our cognitive goals are involved with enoouraging students to use those minds and to encourage their pupils to do likewise.

In order to tackle this job we must know our students well. Their strengths and needs must be clear to them and to us. Our Reading group holds periodic meetings during which we talk this over and suggest procedures to each other.

Let us turn from liberal arts to our professional courses. We believe that the greatest growth in self-confidence along cognitive lines comes when the student feels that he or she knows "what to do." Being able to give an informal reading inventory with ease or being able to teach a child how to use the dictionary are just a few of the essential skills to a good sense of self-confidence on the teacher's part. We feel that the knowledge of the ways to teach reading, the ways to find out what the difficulties are that a child is having with reading or knowing how to motivate independent reading, for example, are essential tasks. Once a teacher can do all of this, self-esteem rises.

Affective aspects

Our goals, however, do not limit themselves to the cognitive strengths of our students. We would like to deal also with affective areas, so that they, in turn, can deal with such areas with their pupils in school situations. This involves a great deal of interaction with our students on a small group and individual basis. We desire to hear their thoughts and ideas just as we urge them to value those of their pupils. We help them to evaluate their work with a sense of confidence. We want them to know that everyone is capable of improvement. We are not their primary evaluators. They are their own critics.

In our class sessions we leave ample time for questions or discussion of problems. Students build self-esteem by hearing that a method they used successfully can help others as well. It is a time also when students reveal their personal interests -- what makes them unique -- and they begin to understand how this uniqueness can inspire their children into wholesome directions. We ask the question, "what is there about you that is different and unique? How can your pupils benefit from this?"

One student told me that she had nothing "unique" to offer. Later we found out that she loved to draw. Her charming cartoons brought her teaching to life. Humor entered her classroom and her children learned more easily. Another student was a skillful knitter. The children in her class found patterns that their

parents or grandparents brought from South America or the Caribbean area. History, geography and beautiful knitted ponchos resulted. These two students in particular were surprised to learn that these skills would be valuable or even acceptable in a classroom. The only part of themselves they intended to reveal was their academic abilities.

Values

Louis E. Raths in his book Teaching for Learning, stresses the role of values. He says "we think of values as giving direction to life; they represent our own personal choices and preferences." We know that our students will construct their values and then reconstruct them during their time with us at the college. We would like to hekp them deepen their experiences - both real experiences with children and adults and vicarious experiences through books and other writings. We hope that they will leave us with values that make them not "just" teachers but educators. In Rath's words we fight against cynicism, apathy and indifference, as well as, a lack of controlling purpose on the part of teachers. We also try to help students resist overconformity, to have their own ideas and to try them out.

This humanistic approach is especially important for urban teachers. New York City is very big and can often be cold and impersonal. You can feel like "just one of a big mob." Today, however, New York City is changing. There is

no longer one school district for its hundreds of thousands of school children but over thirty separate districts. Parent groups find their district staffs more responsive to their children's progress. As you will hear, we work very closely with the school districts and the community. Our philosophy is that children learn when teaching is carefully tuned to their individual needs and when the teacher is also carefully tuned to those children.

I would like to close with one anecdote which I believe illustrates our goals as well as the ways we try to carry them out. Several years ago, under the leadership of Prof. Watkins-Mincy, The Upper Manhattan Reading Council of I R A was formed at City College. The membership is made up essentially of our students and our former students. These students come, not only to meetings, but they have a home at our Reading Center and are a vital part of our lives. On April 10 and 11th, The City College School of Education with the Upper Manhattan Chapter of I R A, sponsored a reading conference. 500 people attended. Our students worked day and night -- often until 2 - 3 AM on this conference. The conference was a success. And, we would like to think, so is our program.